



ON PRECIOUS PEARLS
THE STREET



THE STREET OF PRECIOUS PEARLS

by

NORA WALN

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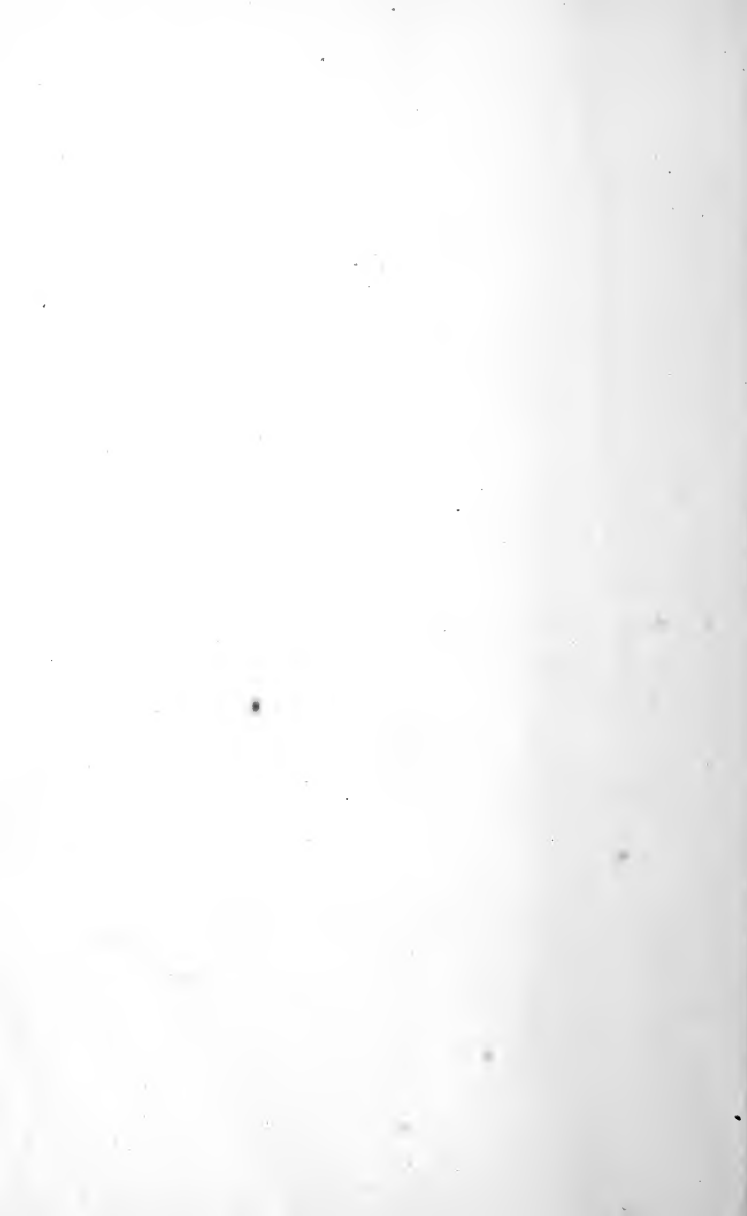
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To Grace Coppock, who first encouraged me to go into the Far East, I owe deep gratitude.

From the women of China I have learned that World Fellowship is not alone an intellectual concept but a natural law in accordance with which the hearts of all women throb to the same rhythmic beat of the Universe.

To the women of America I dedicate this story of the life of my Chinese friend and teacher: it is as accurate as she with her small store of English words, and I with my limited knowledge of her language could make it.



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*Wherein
Yen Kuei
Ping turns
off from the
Big Horse Street
to make
purchases
on the
Street of
Precious
Pearls*



TURNING off from the Da Mou Lui or the Big Horse Street, the name common to the main street in Chinese towns and villages, there is to be found, if one seeks diligently for it, the Street of Precious Pearls. Always it is a side street. Often it is so narrow that two sedan chairs cannot pass. At those times of the day when the shadows are long there is no golden sunshine reflected from the cobblestones that pave the street. But I have found, for I like to visit the little shops on side streets, that the more precious jewels glow with a warmer brilliancy when the day outside is dark.

It is the street of greatest importance to every Chinese girl. On it will be bought her dowry jewels. Ancient custom rules that the betrothed bride shall convert the wealth she inherits from her father's household into precious stones. And so it is here on the Street of Precious Pearls that her inheritance is spent, lest by bringing money, as such, into her husband's household she reflect upon the ability of her new family to support her.

Yen Kuei Ping sat passively quiet as her chair-bearers turned into the street at a low spoken word from her grandmother. She was third in the procession. Madame Yen rode first, directly behind the house servant

who walked ahead, breaking a way through the crowded Big Horse Street and into the quieter Street of Precious Pearls, crying, "Lend light, lend light." Next to Madame Yen came Kuei Ping's mother, and bringing up the rear was a fourth chair in which was carried a distant relative, by name Chang An, who held a place in the household a trifle higher than that of a trusted servant.

Following the swaying tapestried box-like chairs that marked the presence of her mother and grandmother, Kuei Ping leaned forward in her seat, peering through the horizontal aperture in front of her with brightening eyes. The Street of Precious Pearls was quiet and cool. Moss clung to the bases of buildings and the grasses that had ventured up through the paving stones were worn away only in a central path and in patches in front of entrance ways. Now and then someone came from beneath one of the heavy curtain-like doors that closed a shop, and slipped along the silent street, but the padded shoes of the pedestrian made no noise on the grass-covered stones. Here was a peace and quiet akin to the hush of the Mission Church, Kuei Ping caught herself thinking, and then flushed at what she thought her irreverence in comparing the gorgeous pageantry of the

procession as she saw it silhouetted against the dust-dulled gold lacquer of the shops with the aesthetic simplicity of the Chapel.

They had traversed more than half the entire length of the street when Madame Yen's chair came to a stop before a shop with rich fligree carvings and double entrance doors of heavy velvet with brass frames. At the sound of their approach, two attendants of the door stepped forward and swung it wide, that the chair-bearers might carry the ladies into a tiny inner courtyard before they need dismount, saying as they bowed, "Honorable ladies, enter the humble shop." Thereupon, the narrower inner curtains of the shop itself were held open and Madame Yen and her relatives, bowing low, returned the formal greeting and passed within.

At the entry of customers, numerous clerks and underlings, so it seemed to Kuei Ping, swarmed forward with greetings and formal offerings of stools upon which to sit and with cups of tea to drink. The head of the shop and his partners flicked their long-stemmed pipes from sleepy lips and rose, as though from deep meditation, struggling a bit with the light that would penetrate into their eyes, even in the darkened room, as they bowed,

offering the courtesy of "the miserable place to the pleasure of their honorable guests."

The eldest among them with his own hand took from an attendant each cup of tea as it was brought and offered it with a low bow to his guest. Kuei Ping, lifting her gaze now and then from the floor, caught a glint of joy of the coming bargain in the corners of the shrewd old dealer's mouth and in her grandmother's eyes, even in the midst of courtesy and greeting.

Rich jewels were brought forth, for Kuei Ping's own grandfather was a well known silk merchant and the coming alliance with an official family was not beyond the knowledge of Wong Lui, dealer in jewels. Madame Yen gave but a sweeping glance to the first display placed before her. Kuei Ping had slipped into the background, but her mother and the relative looked over the jewels and then up at Madame Yen as if to agree that they were not worthy of attention. Wong Lui held various secret conferences with his head clerk, and boys slipped away into dark recesses to bring forth rarer treasures. Madame Yen and her daughter preferred pearls, and from the mysterious caverns of the shop they were brought. Exquisite gems, each wrapped separately, were removed from

their covers and glowed in a wondrous heap on the dark velvet cover of the teakwood table.

Kuei Ping liked rich warm color but she liked it best subdued in the luminous pearls. She was a favorite with her grandmother and this preference was no secret to Madame Yen who placed her chair, now, as the hour grew on, that Kuei Ping might get the full value of the beauty of the fabulous heap. Carefully, one by one, the preferred gems were separated from those of lesser beauty by the two women. And still at intervals, as though he had just awakened to some almost forgotten knowledge, Wong Lui would cease caressing his drooping moustaches with his slender hands and wave a clerk away to bring even rarer treasure.

But all things come to end in time and these mysterious errands grew farther and farther apart and finally ceased. Wong Lui had placed his best before them. Kuei Ping from under her modestly lowered lashes caught glimpses of bright eyes that glowed from the darkness of the inner rooms, the curious little clerks and underlings who peered through the dividing parchment, eagerly following the tableau in the center of the shop.

Not until the selected heap was before her did Madame Yen speak of price and then only as a question. Kuei Ping had seen her grandmother bargain before and so she scarce drew her attention away from the lustrous heap of jewels even to listen. Wong Lui, too, was seasoned at the game which both dearly loved and so with the skill of chess players they moved slowly, each toward his goal, each carefully measuring the other's power to yield from his quoted price. At intervals, when the conflict might have grown a trifle sharp, cups of tea were served.

Kuei Ping, resting her eyes upon the pearls so soon to be hers, drank deep draughts of their beauty. Impelled by their drawing power she gathered a handful of them up in her soft pink palm, unmindful of the bargainers but not unnoted by them. The quick eyes of each had counted the number and the face of Madame Yen had softened as she looked upon the girl. Wong Lui had noted that also and put it down in his favor in the game before them.

The girl, holding the jewels thus in her hand that she might feel their nearness, saw them glow into warmer color as she held them, as though her touch breathed life into them. In after years she was to think often

of the care with which they had been selected and to pay homage in memory to the experience and knowledge which made possible that rare power of choice, for even Wong Lui, seasoned dealer in jewels, had shown respect for Madame Yen's judgment.

With a suddenness so abrupt as to make her feel she must have jerked physically, Kuei Ping was back in memory, as she was so often these days, at the little mission school where she had been sent when she could go no farther in lessons with her brothers at home. This too had been an indulgence upon the part of her family, gained by her nearness to her grandmother.

It was graduation day. This was the memory she conned over most often. Kuei Ping had stood first in her class and when the exercises were over she had stolen away into the garden to bid it a last farewell, with the small remembrance reward that had been given to her clasped in her hand. Ever since that day Kuei Ping had worn it next her heart. She could feel its hard edge now as she sat holding the pearls. In memory the fragrant perfume of the la France roses at the end of the walk drifted out to her again, she recalled the crunching sound Miss Porter's stiff foreign shoes had made as she came

down the path, and the tenseness of the principal's voice as she had spoken, asking Kuei Ping to come and sit in the arbor and talk with her.

From the first day Kuei Ping entered school she had worshipped the tall golden-haired American girl in the shrine of her heart as an Angel of Freedom. While they sat in the arbor she had held Kuei Ping's hand in the foreign way. Kuei Ping thrilled to the memory of that touch more than to the glow of the pearls. Miss Porter built for the girl who listened at her side that afternoon, a dream bridge of words that connected the road of Kuei Ping's life with that strange land called the United States, where men and women had equal opportunity, and from which the Chinese girl with her brilliant mind trained to new ways might return to give service to her own country women. Kuei Ping had held her breath lest she lose a word while Miss Porter talked, quiet at first, carried away by the marvel of the opportunity, then very still because she knew its impossibility. For at the spring holidays Madame Yen had told her granddaughter of the plans for her marriage and had given her the engagement gifts from the Chia household that had

been kept these two years now, waiting until she should be finished with school.

Her family loved her. Kuei Ping had known that from the first moment she opened her eyes and smiled into her mother's face. They awaited her return home and her fulfillment of their plans for her. There were ties that bound her a part of the whole which made up the unit of her family, bonds that could not be pushed aside with the brusqueness that made possible the spirit of freedom that lit the eyes of the American girl. And yet it was this spirit of freedom and of service in the wider ways of life to which she had built the secret shrine within her heart. It was a hard conflict, but Kuei Ping's decision was reached before she had lifted her quiet eyes to thank Miss Porter and say that she could not go.

The latter had been a trifle curt. Kuei Ping had wept bitter tears over it since, because she had failed the person she admired most in all the world. The utter futility of attempting to make East and West understand each other had stilled her lips from any sharing of her feeling about her home, or any repetition to her grandmother of the conversation in the garden. The engagement bracelets in the bureau in her mission school room

and the silver honor medal beneath her dress were each sacred things that belonged in separate parts of her life.

Madame Yen reached over now to Kuei Ping for the pearls she had taken from the table, that they might be put in the same case with the others. The bargain was closed. Fresh cups of tea were brought forth and refused, Madame Yen and her relatives saying over and over as they were bowed out, "We have squandered your valuable time," and Wong Lui and his attendants begging them not to waste their breath in courtesy for his humble shop.

Outside, the chair-bearers, trained to patience by long hours, waited.

*Wherein
there is a
wedding and
Kuei Ping
becomes a
member of
the family
of Chia*



WHEN Kuei Ping was a child of six, playing at games with the little cousins who dwelt in the Yen compound, or teasing to learn to read with her brothers, soothsayers, upon examination of a document from the house of Chia, had found that her destiny was entwined with that of Chia Fuh Tang, ten years her senior. With care the grey old man, whose judgment Madame Yen trusted, had taken the card upon which were drafted the eight characters indicating the year, the month, the day, and the hour at which Fuh Tang had entered the world and, comparing them with the similar characters of the girl, had returned a favorable report of the auspiciousness of the union. With deliberation and due patience he had compared the combination of their characters with each of the five elements, metal, wood, water, fire and earth, to make sure that in the proposed marriage there was no destroying omen such as the uniting of wood and fire. He next discovered that the two cyclic animals that had presided over the birth of the youthful couple were not at variance with each other. Thereon it was ascertained that the two would abide together in harmony.

Later, the Imperial Calendar being consulted as to the black and yellow days which

would govern the lives of the two, a second document was sent from the house of Chia, informing the family of Yen that the fourteenth day of the month had been found to be the day most favorable to the conclusion of an engagement and asking that, if found agreeable to them, a return document, setting the month, be returned. Fate had already decided the month as the second of the Chinese calendar year by causing the girl to be born under the sign of the tiger. The culmination of the alliance had waited but the year to be set by the contracting families as the eighteenth spring of Kuei Ping's life.

The month, corresponding to April on the western calendar of that year, came with a touch of summer on its breath. Soft rains fell early. From the wind-dried earth sprang a carpet of velvety green. By the middle of the month brown-green orchids had pushed out to the light, azaleas and the wild wisteria were opening buds, the yellow mustard scattered gold over the country-sides, and the southeast wind was languid with the sickening sweet perfume of the purple soi bean.

Kuei Ping, wearing the heavy wedding garments in which she had been dressed, felt near to suffocation in the close room. Yet she shuddered as from a chill when Chang An,

having put the finishing touches to the married way of hair-dressing, placed the vanity case before her, urging the girl to teach her own fingers the arrangement.

The old woman felt the shudder and the tense strain of the girl's body as she fastened the tiny buttons of the collar of Kuei Ping's dress. Looking down at her she said tenderly, "Be not alarmed, little flower of our hearts. Thou needest have no fear. Look but into the mirror at thy beauteous face before the veil is dropped over it. What man living could pass by the fire of thy deep eyes untouched! Look now, as I hold the veil of pearls before thy eyes, and see that they out- rival the lustre of the gems. Even thy hands are shaped like the petals of the new opened lotus, and thy grace is as exquisite as that of the wind-swayed blossom. Take the incense burner and make thy heart a lake of peace upon which thy beauty may float with the serenity of the flower thou dost resemble."

Kuei Ping, gazing deep into the mirror as into a wondering dream, reached out her hands for the many-wired burner Chang An brought ere she left the little bride alone. Slowly, one by one, the girl smoothed out the twisted curves until the interlacing grooves were one continuous whole in which the in-

cense burned before the Goddess of Mercy without a break.

The hours hung heavy upon her. Over the door that closed her from the feasting came stray bits of gossip. She heard the click of ivory dominoes as the dowagers gambled at sparrow. The plaintive call of stringed instruments came to her as from a great distance. Now and then, as a minstrel took up the refrain, she caught the words of some old love song, or heard repeated in chant the valor of a departed family hero.

The clamor outside grew greater and then subsided into the murmur of conversation. The one o'clock feast had passed. The shadows of late afternoon sank into darkness. A servant came to light a taper beside her mirror. Chang An returned and put the finishing touches to her toilet. Her mother wrapped the long band of red satin around her head over the new hair arrangement signifying that they bound her to the will of the family to which they sent her. Madame Yen with loving fingers placed the inner veil of red chiffon and then dropped over it the veil of pearls that had come the day before from the bridegroom. The long strip of red silk carpet was laid by servants that she might go to kneel before the family altar and then

be placed in the waiting sedan chair without touching her feet to the polluting ground.

The time of departure was near. The rooms and courtyards in which she had lived were strangely unfamiliar with their elaborate decking in honor of the event. Heavily veiled and her eyes lowered, she felt rather than saw the crowded mass of her relatives. The minstrel took up the wail of separation and loss. She heard the tossing of the four cakes which were to bring luck to her family, and the rattle of the sieve placed over her wedding chair to ward off evil spirits as she was sealed into it.

The journey which she must make in darkness began. Ahead of her, almost a mile long, the procession of her attendants went. Sitting strained and still she could hear the clash and clang of brass cymbals, the shifting of burdens from tired shoulders at regular intervals, and now and then, as she strained her eyes, the flare of waving torches. Half way to the end of the tiring journey the noise increased, and she gathered that they had been met by members of the bridegroom's family. Dull red balls of light swung above the entrance gates. Her chair was borne through the double rows of the procession which had preceded her and set down in a

reception room. She heard the murmuring words of good omen uttered as she was helped from her cramped seat and out onto a second strip of red carpet that led to the part of the compound that was to be hers.

Kuei Ping saw Chia Fuh Tang for the first time in one swift stolen glance from behind her veil. He stood with his back to her as she entered the doorway. In that glance she knew that he was taller than her father, that he wore a long mandarin garment with a square of heavy embroidery in the center of the back, over which a black queue hung; she saw the flash of a jewel in the front of his hat as he turned toward her. Then she must lower her eyes to the floor where his dark slippers made a spot of contrast with the bright carpet.

He came forward to meet her. Kuei Ping, hidden beneath the concealing veils, was led forward a few steps by her attendants. Then, as custom dictated, both sat for a few minutes side by side. Kuei Ping, still wrapped in the long veil that reached to the hem of her wedding garments, too weary to stand alone, leaning upon Chang An and another attendant was then led forth to kneel with Fuh Tang before the family altar in worship of heaven and earth and to make low obeisance

before the Chia ancestral tablets. Here Chang An lifted the edge of her veil that she might drink with the bridegroom from a goblet of wine ere she was led back into her room to dress for the wedding feast.

Her tired nerves seemed almost to snap at the continued twang of the stringed instruments. Chang An cooled her hot brow with calming hands as she took away the heavy veils and helped to dress her in the lighter dainty pink garments from her trousseau chest. And Kuei Ping, remembering that Madame Yen had told her that Fuh Tang too had attended a foreign school, and the evidences of ill ease he had shown in the ordeal that had passed, wondered whether he knew of the western custom of personal choice, and stilled her own trembling with the realization that he had not seen her as yet.

Fuh Tang saw her first thus, with tenderness and something akin to pity in her eyes, when he came to sit and wait for the serving of the feast. Food was placed before them but custom forbade the bride to eat or sleep for three days. She must sit with downcast eyes, her face immovable while the feasting about her went on, the target of all eyes, the subject of ribald jokes. Long hours passed again in which she had need of all the pa-

tience gained with the little incense burner. They left as a memory the odor of heavy perfume that came from hot rooms, the clatter of chopsticks and bowls, the glimmer of many-colored robes and the glitter of jewels of the men guests, strangers and relatives, who came in an almost ceaseless stream during that first twelve hours to gaze upon the beauty of the bride. Their remarks burned as a searing iron across her consciousness.

Two more days the feasting lasted. Women kinsfolk of the family who had not met together for many months, gossiped and drank tea, adding color to the women's side of the large compound with their rich garments of brocade and satin. Some of them swayed on small bound feet with a "golden lily" glide. They went about examining the chests of wedding gifts, commenting upon the hundred and twenty boxes filled with garments and linens, discussing the charms put here and there to bring good luck.

In the other side of the vast dwelling place the men drank wine and made merry, their long-skirted garments of silk in seafoam green and saffron and deep blue, and their chains of amber and jade and the settings of diamonds and pearls on their hands and in their hats outdoing the vivid glory of the

women's dress. Here Fuh Tang went at intervals to offer hospitality in food and wine, and to joke with his guests.

On the morning of the third day Kuei Ping came forth to find the guests for the most part dispersed, to worship at the ancestral tablets with her husband, to make low obeisance to her honorable new mother and father and the elder relatives, and to show her respect before the household Kitchen God.

Thus Kuei Ping became an integral part of the family of Chia.



*Wherein
there is a
departure
from family
custom and
Kuei Ping
goes with
her husband
to live
in Peking*



MOONLIGHT on which the white magnolia flowers floated as birds about to take wing, filled the courtyard and touched the town with a magic of pale green gold. Kuei Ping could not sleep. She lay wide-eyed, following the pattern that a moonbeam made as it filtered through the parchment window. Unable to resist longer the call of the path of light she slid from her bed to the floor. Cautiously pulling about her the long garment that lay waiting for the morning, she crept through the door of her pavilion into the courtyard. Still holding her slippers in her hand she listened for sounds of others awake. From the rooms of her honorable women relatives came only the rhythmic breathing of deep sleep.

She passed safely out of the women's division of the compound, stealing through the intricate lacery of courtyards and curious-shaped gateways, stopping to dabble her fingers in the waters of a fountain and then, at a disturbed quack from the pet heron who stood sleeping with one foot drawn up beneath him, she sped carefully away. Her shadow mingled with that of the flowering magnolia trees as she slipped from place to place like a long-caged bird trying its wings in newly gained freedom, stooping now over

the fragrant heart of a rose, brushing gently the stiff little potted evergreens that stood in a row at the base of the spirit screen, turning back to feel the velvet of the purple iris, holding up her hands to let the full-blown wisteria petals flutter through them.

From over the walls came a mysterious groping after expression from the strings of some blind wandering musician. It vibrated on the heart of Kuei Ping, calling her beyond the confines of the compound she had entered as a bride two months earlier. Square across the entrance gateway, placed so that evil spirits flying in to bring disaster would be flung back, stood the high, many-colored spirit screen guarding the household, while it slumbered, from disaster. Her hand still touching the familiar potted trees on the inner side of the screen, Kuei Ping crept around it. No sound save that of irregular snoring came from the gatekeeper's house. Her fingers trembled as they sought for the open link in the chain that held the bar across the outer gate. A wild rose that had clambered up beside the gateway and dared to cross the bits of broken glass that made more impassable the top of the wall gave her courage. Noiselessly she slid the bar and stood without the compound.

How soft the dust felt beneath her feet as they touched it for the first time. Pilgrimages she had made with her honorable mother-in-law to pay respect to the ancestral hall, to worship at the temple of Buddha, and to ask after the health of Madame Yen and her household, but it was not fitting that the new bride should soil her feet upon the common ground. Chair-bearers came within the courtyard to bear her forth upon those journeys.

Leaning back against the wall, Kuei Ping drew a deep breath of air. Now near and now far away the music called. Thither along the road to his former place in the world of other affairs Fuh Tang had returned six days after their marriage. Above her head the wood-rose nodded in the breeze. Men went out and beyond. Women in that far-away land from which Miss Porter came, walked, too, in similar paths of freedom.

She looked up at the venturesome rose. It wafted down fragrant perfume. On her questioning mind came a consciousness of a change in the music—loneliness and a vague hunger that died away in a vibration of despair. There came upon the heart of Kuei Ping an overpowering sense of walls that stretched along the dusty hutung, closing in

upon the lives of uncountable women. Even the roots of the wood-rose held her body within the compound. With cold hands and eyes blinded by tears she put the bar back in place. Her feet caught in the skirt of her long mandarin robe as she stumbled back into her room.

The morning would bring its round of regular hours in which she, the wife of the eldest son, would continue her lessons in family duties, ready to take the burden when it should fall from the ageing shoulders of Madame Chia.

The noon of the day brought its difference. Kuei Ping sat on the folded rug at the feet of her new mother, putting tiny stitches in a piece of satin embroidery, when the sounds of welcoming voices came from the outer court. The women's conversation about small household affairs was stilled as they heard the gate-man repeating the name of Fuh Tang, and the other servants take up the cry, "You bring us unexpected joy by your presence, most gracious master." A needle prick from which a drop of red blood stained Kuei Ping's embroidery was the only trace of excitement the quiet little bride showed as she rose to greet him with his mother. Within her there fluttered a hope that he had come upon this

unexpected visit in answer to a call from her heart. She breathed a prayer of thanksgiving to the Goddess of Merciful Gifts that she had been given patience to perform the tasks of the day in quietness, and that she had donned for the afternoon the most becoming of the wisteria silk garments from her trousseau chests. The wistful light in her eyes changed to one of sure gladness as they met his. She heard the explanation of his coming as put into words to their most gracious mother, but Kuei Ping knew without words that he had come because he loved her.

Throughout the week and on into the next Fuh Tang lingered. The full moon had become a waning quarter, making the lighting of the many-colored lanterns in the courtyard necessary to turn it into a fairy land at twilight time. A messenger came calling him back to his post, and Madame Chia, fearing family dishonor, urged upon her son the necessity for immediate departure as soon as the next day should dawn.

Kuei Ping, bringing back to the gracious mother the household keys with which she had been entrusted to dole out the next day's supplies to the cooks, heard the last words of Fuh Tang's reproof.

It was in the courtyard, where the scat-

tered petals of the blown magnolia flowers were bruised under their feet as they walked, that Fuh Tang told Kuei Ping that he must return upon the morrow to his waiting work. His voice had trembled as he spoke, and Kuei Ping, crushing consciously beneath her tiny embroidered slippers the blossoms that had seemed to dare to float out to freedom and then had dropped in a withered mass on the paved courtyard, had begged him to let her go with him. He had stayed his steps, startled at the suggestion. His calm hands folded into opposite coat sleeves, he had listened with ears that could not believe they heard aright.

Fuh Tang did not depart when morning came. The orders of an Emperor waited. The elders of the two august families of Yen and Chia met together to bring wisdom to the minds of the two young people who contemplated so drastic a departure from family custom. Separately and together they were called before the family tribunal. Faithfully and completely until now both of them had submitted to the rules of tradition; mechanically and faithfully they performed the small duties given them now. Kuei Ping listened to the daily words of her grandmother with reverently bowed head and modestly lowered

eyes. Words were futile, for no one among the women spoke to let her know if by chance they understood.

In humiliation Kuei Ping's heart was lighter than ever before. She knew that Fuh Tang would not depart without her. His younger brother was dispatched to fill Fuh Tang's too long neglected orders.

In early autumn they left the protection and the guidance of their families in disgrace. Love for each other, so strong that it broke down old barriers to personal freedom, set them out upon the road of life a unit separate from the complex life of the compound. Fuh Tang, appealing to the principal of the school he had attended, secured through him a position as clerk with the British consul at Peking.

In the Tartar City just west of the entrance to the Forbidden City they found a small dwelling place.



*Wherein
a son is
born and
there is
great rejoicing*



FROM the time of Kuei Ping's earliest memory she had known that among her people the crown of womanhood was the bearing of a son who would perpetuate the name and the virtue of his ancestors. Feeling the first stirring of a new life entrusted to her, she was filled with joy in the privilege that was hers, a joy that was at times almost overpowered by the fear that she might fail in fulfillment of that trust. Daily she went to the temple of the Merciful One begging the Goddess of One Hundred Children to grant unto her a male child.

Other women waited in the temple also for their turn within the prayer gate, buying fag-gots of incense to burn before the altar, dropping gifts of money and touching infants' shoes to the hem of the Goddess' robe. At times, in these new days of life in the small courtyard where Fuh Tang had founded their home, her thoughts turned to those earlier teachings in school, precepts from the foreign Bible. Kuei Ping had even whiled away idle hours, while she waited for her husband's return from his duties as clerk, by reading the translation her teacher had given her. But now in her time of greatest need she turned back to old familiar ways of worship through which her mother before her had reached

toward an unknown power, behind the wall of earthly life.

Carried by the devious ways of tongue and ear, by which news can travel the length of an empire without need of telephone wires, the knowledge of Kuei Ping's hopes reached the heart of the Yen compound. One morning as she walked with Fuh Tang to the outer gateway, Chang An stood requesting admittance from the gateman. She offered no explanation of her coming save that Madame Yen could no longer give her shelter and that she had come to them for a roof. Thus without loss of face on the part of her elders Kuei Ping was given the comfort of an older woman.

Under the busy fingers of the two the garments prepared for the child grew to a needlessly large heap. Kuei Ping, eager in her preparation, made tiger caps and sewed bright buttons like eyes in the toes of shoes that she knew in her thoughtful moments were in sizes large enough for walking children. Chang An gave suggestions as to the cutting of innumerable padded coats and long hooded caps for winter, and for the scanty garments of bright red for summer. Together they made ready the cradle of peach wood that the child might be rocked safely into a long life.

Twice during the last days of waiting Miss Porter, visiting a friend in the city, came to call upon Kuei Ping. Once the friend, a mission doctor, had accompanied her. This accounted for the stiff white foreign skirt that fluttered before her eyes as Kuei Ping struggled back to a full consciousness of the room and its surroundings.

No joy in anticipation had prepared the young mother for the wonder of the babe as it lay nestled within her arm. Watching with languid eyes the quick deft movements of the foreign woman as she made the bed more comfortable, and beyond her the familiar figure of Chang An lighting the tapers of the Lamp of Seven Wicks to warn disaster from the new-born son, Kuei Ping slipped into a dream in which her child grew up to see both East and West and interpret the best of each to the other.

The months that followed were rich in happiness. Winter melted into spring. Flowers bloomed in the courtyard. Street vendors came each morning with great bunches of long-stemmed violets. On starlit evenings Fuh Tang carried his little son out into the courtyard where they sat talking of their happiness and his future.

It was on a late afternoon when fruit hung

ripe on the hawthorn trees, and soft autumn breezes swayed the leaves of the moonflower vine that the sturdy baby made his first attempt to walk. Fuh Tang and Kuei Ping, both leaving him to stand in Chang An's hands, moved away, a double inducement for him to take his first step. Intent upon the child they did not hear the sound of a guest entering the courtyard gate. Daring at last to make the venture, the baby toddled into Fuh Tang's outstretched arms, and it was not until he stood holding the child that they perceived their aged father, Chia Sung Lien, looking in upon them.

Fuh Tang, going each day to his duties at the office of the British consul, brought back news of the events of the outside world, but Kuei Ping, her life full to overflowing in her love for her husband and child and occupied with the tasks of making the slender income supply the daily needs of the household, had scarce realized that men outside were at war. The news that the father bore them brought close the realization. Fuh Tang's only brother, dispatched more than a year ago to fill his place in ignored orders, had fallen in battle under General Tso in a vain attempt to defend the city of Pingyang from the Japanese.

The aged man's eyes followed hungrily the movements of his sturdy grandchild, while they brought him a chair and tea and offered the courtesies due to age from youth. He took from his pockets gifts to the little son who held out his baby hands, unafraid, to receive them.

When the women and child had retired into the house and Fuh Tang sat with his father alone in the gathering twilight the old man spoke of the need of a man child to carry on the traditions of the Chia household, to give rest to the departed dead and minister to the spirits of those who wandered in the unknown beyond. He spoke almost with fear of the sonlessness of the brother who had gone, and he asked that the little grandson be returned to his rightful place in the family even if his parents must pursue a foolish and selfish desire for freedom.

Bowed with a heavier sorrow than when he entered, with even the shadow of dread lurking in his eyes, Chia Sung Lien turned back from his fruitless errand. Youth with its new spirit of freedom had refused to place upon the altar of old tradition its most precious gift.

Fuh Tang and Kuei Ping, talking the matter over alone, had come to know that each

believed that if their ideal for their son was to be realized he must live his life in the freer atmosphere of their own home.

Untouched by the near tragedy in the lives of his elders, little Bo Te played happily with the pearl charm Chang An had hung from a silver chain about his neck.

*Wherein
shadows
throw
their
length
across
the tidy
courtyard*



FUHTANG lay ill. The heaviness upon his chest grew more and more. Kuei Ping, straightening the fever-tossed coverlets, knew that the charms of the medical man who had been summoned had no power to heal her husband. A great fear laid hold of her—a fear that drove her out into the icy night alone. No chair-bearer came in answer to her frantic call and the slender means of the household did not support a private chair. Bending her head to break the force of the wind she struggled somehow to the door of the mission doctor who had eased her own pain a year ago. With bare fists she pounded against the gate for admittance; in staccato breaths she cried out her need to the sleepy gateman.

The old man who opened the door told her that the doctor had been away since early evening. Many people were ill and the foreign doctor took no rest but he would tell her the instant she returned.

Kuei Ping refused to come inside and wait. The lonely return through the streets had no terror for her equal to the fear that Fuh Tang might call for her and find her gone when he wanted her most. The doctor came into the little courtyard, weary from a long day and night without sleep, just as the first

feeble rays of dawn lit the sky. The doctor's weariness seemed to drop from her like her outer garments as she began work upon her patient. Noon-day showed a marked change in his breathing and evening found him sleeping quietly.

Knowledge and careful nursing brought Fuh Tang back to life again but never again did he recover his old strength. A slight cough persisted long after spring was with them and Fuh Tang had returned to his work, a cough that grew more frequent as summer came on. All about them men and women and little children died of such coughs, blinked out like candles after five or six years of slow burning weariness. He did not speak of it to Kuei Ping but a great dread came over him which grew into a weariness that made work almost impossible. He did not have the disease, thus Fuh Tang argued with himself, his fatigue was but the result of his long illness, yet some foreboding kept him from going to a foreign doctor to confirm his belief that he did not have it.

It was then that he began to smoke a long-stemmed pipe. Just a few whiffs of opium quieted his nerves and gave him pleasant dreamless sleep from which he woke rested and ready for work. Upon his salary the

daily food for his family depended. In leaving the family compound the two had become in reality a separate economic unit. Fuh Tang's earnings, plus some money he had possessed at the time of their taking the small home in Peking, had been sufficient for only a very simple mode of life. During his illness his pay had come regularly. For this Fuh Tang was grateful, but he grew anxious lest he be unable to perform his daily tasks.

At first short smokes gave him relief from worry. Just one on the way to work in the morning stilled the desperate growing pain in his chest, seemed even to still his coughing. Then as the months went by, the amount needed for relief grew greater. He came to have a hunted desperate look in his face if he did not get the opium at the usual time. The smoking made necessary his leaving home earlier than formerly if he was to keep from Kuei Ping the knowledge of his fear. He laid the first stone in the barrier which grew up between them when he did not share with her his anxiety. Kuei Ping, carrying her second child, was more sensitive than in normal times.

The frosts of late autumn had turned to dried husks the beauty of the garden. Was it to be so with their love which had begun with such happiness? Thus Kuei Ping found

herself questioning day after day. Even little Bo Te did not seem to call unto himself as much of his father's attention as formerly, yet he grew more fascinating every day, his mother felt.

Fuh Tang, fighting the weariness that crept further upon him, came to leave the shelter of his home with a sense of relief. Outside he could smoke and let down under the strain of pain and the necessity to struggle against his growing absent-mindedness.

Thus the first shadows of a wall of doubt separating Kuei Ping and Fuh Tang cast their length across the tidy courtyard of their youthful love.

*Wherein
there is
deepening
sorrow*



KUEI PING'S second son lived but a few hours. Chang, preparing the burial rites, sobbing her grief and disappointment even as she summoned the soothsayer to examine the Imperial Calendar for the lucky day upon which to place the small body in its coffin, felt utterly baffled by the quiet passiveness of the mother. It was to Fuh Tang that she must turn for every decision and whom she must help to still his grief while the message requesting burial in the Chia family burial grounds was written and dispatched by messenger.

It was Chang An who placed the mirror above the door of Kuei Ping's room, hoping that it would change the evil that had entered the house into real happiness. It was she who procured the blue papers to paste upon the entrance gateway announcing a death within the compound. It was she who tied about the neck of the deceased child two wisps of cotton wool in order that he might bear away the misfortune of the family and save it from a too numerous brood of girl children.

Chia Sung Lien, fearing that this may have been a frustrated attempt by his younger son to come to the aid of his family by re-entering the world through the body of the child, returned with the messenger to make

sure that the soul be given the most careful attention, and that the burial rites be attended with more elaboration than usual for a baby.

To Kuei Ping the weeks and months that followed were one long weary night-mare. By day she haggled with tradesman and food-shop keepers over the price of a bit of cloth for garments for Bo Te, over shrimp for soup or vegetables and rice for food. At night she lay shivering under the coverlets, listening to the restless tossing of her husband, kept awake by her own thoughts and his loud breathing.

Fuh Tang sank lower and lower into the lethargy of opium smoking until one day he returned home to announce that the British consul had no more work for him that season. He no longer strove to hide the use of the drug from her, his only desire was to get it. Day after day he sat dreaming his colorless dreams while she struggled with the problem of keeping a roof over their heads, one by one pawning their possessions until little save the bare walls remained.

These walls, closing in upon her daily, became menacing shadows at night. Bitterly she condemned her own blindness in believing

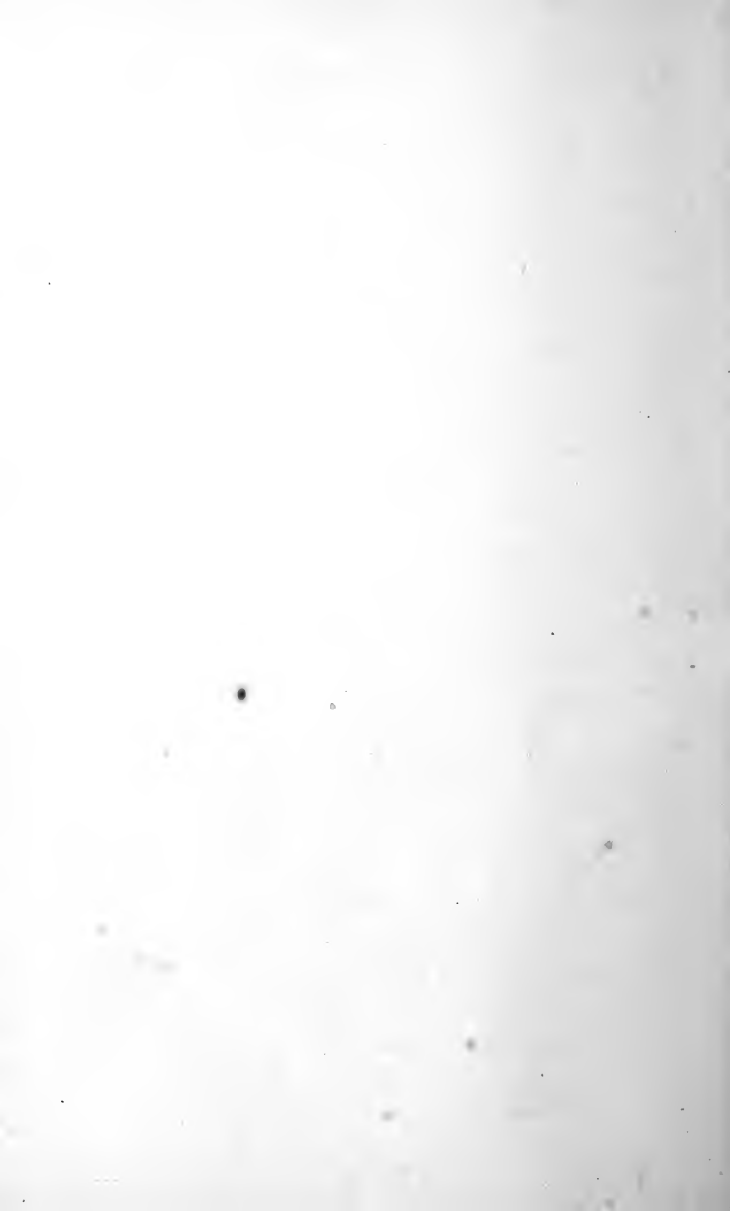
that she had hoped to find freedom in this way.

Thus the poison of the poppy stilled into pleasantness the dreams of Fuh T'ang and the poison of selfish despair did its work upon the heart of Kuei Ping.

Meanwhile the winds grew colder and winter came upon them.



*Wherein
the heart
of a woman
is occupied
with one
desire*



KUEI PING, struggling against the sense of walls that shut her off from life and any understanding of it, spoke quick words of rebellion when Chang An urged upon her a more frequent attendance at the temple of Buddha. Borne in upon the heart of Kuei Ping came a desire to pierce through and beyond the walls that menaced her, to force her way through the shadowy darkness she could no longer tolerate and find the way to the light of which Miss Porter had spoken in early morning chapel long ago.

In her earlier times of need she had instinctively turned to worship of the Merciful One, but now she could force her blinding eyes to see nothing save the smirking smile on the face of the lacquer god. The routine of prayers seemed but a mockery; the burning of incense faggots before the fat squatting creature but added to the ugliness of his already over-smoked and oily figure. Peace she no longer brought upon herself in the temple, because peace was no longer what she wanted.

Out and beyond herself and all of the women of her race she wanted to go, out to find and serve that God whom she had heard called the God of Life and of Light. Turning through her slender book of translations

from the western Bible she marked, as she read, all the phrases which called her out to service, marked them until they stood in bold relief upon the pages overshadowing with their prominence all the other words.

Little Bo Te played unheeded at her feet. Heavier and heavier upon her husband sank the evils of consumption, and it was to his long slender pipe he turned feverishly for relief from pain and doubt.

Unlit, the candles of the house furnished no glow for those who dwelt within.

*Wherein
Kuei Ping
prepares
for a
pilgrimage*



KUEI PING made her preparations for departure carefully and quietly. She put into the parcel of clothing only the barest necessities, leaving the warmer garments and her dowry pearls, which she had still clung to even when everything else of value had been sacrificed for the use of the others of her household. She made sure that there was a fair supply of rice in the house and that Chang An had prepared some in readiness for the morning meal. She wrote a short note telling of her departure. Then she steeled her heart against entering the room where her husband and little son lay sleeping. It was better thus, she told herself, that she should go away in the night without any fuss or staying of steps. She knew that she must go if she was to find the truth for which she sought, and the desire to find it was the controlling motive of her life. What she had left of material things would last until the news of her departure reached the Chia compound. Then they would call Fuh Tang back with eager voices to the ease and plenty of his family, and he would take the little son with him. Kuei Ping felt that it was right that he should, but she knew that if she was to hold to that resolution she must not enter the room for one last look at the sleeping boy.

It was night, the second time in her life that she walked through the city streets alone, but she felt no fear. They led her to freedom. As she passed from the dusty courtyard and through innumerable hutungs on the outer side of grey walls, she was filled with a longing to tell the women shut within those walls of what she had learned and why she went. Lanterns hung at gateways threw out feeble rays of light along the narrow passages. Turning into Hatamen Street she found a sleepy chair-bearer who carried her out to one of the farther city gates. There she dismissed him, for she sought peace and quiet in which to prepare for her new life of service. Shut within the walls of her home she could make no plans. A guard lay asleep at one of the gateways leading to the top of the city wall. She passed by him unnoticed and found a secluded spot on beyond an overlooking watch tower.

Here in the quiet above the city she prayed, seeking for knowledge. A gentle dew seemed to moisten the parched earth as she waited. Then there came the hush of nature that precedes dawn. A faint touch of gold appeared in the sky behind the purple western hills. The gold was shot with rays of flame color that melted into warm amber

which became softened around the edges with lavender and wisteria shades; then in the ever-changing heavens amid the glory of color rose the sun, complete in its magnificence, giving light unto the entire world.

Kuei Ping stilled her prayer to gaze in wonder at the beauty of the sunrise and then to look down upon the city as it roused itself for the tasks of the day. What she saw were but familiar things in a new light. She saw an old man taking down the shutters from his shop. She saw the dark lurking figures, the petty thieves and marauders of the night, slink away through side alleys, and in their places came the familiar traveling restaurant with its bowls of steaming morning broth. She heard the restaurant carrier's voice mingled with the call of the hucksters from the country. She heard the feeble cry of a waking baby. Over the wall in the compound just below her she watched a little lad patting earth about a leafless plant with his two hands while an amah urged him in to eat his morning rice.

Kuei Ping turned to her worn book to read again the words of Jesus as He had told of the Father to all those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. She read of love and of patience and of understanding for the trials

of others and of forgetfulness of self. Patience and quiet which she had thought of until now as attributes only of Buddha she saw welded into the personality of the Son who had come to dwell on earth that those who sought Him might know more of his Father. Her vague longing for knowledge and for service became a desire to live as He had lived, simply and lovingly sharing whatever knowledge was trusted to her as He had shared with those of his own household and the small section of the world where He had dwelt.

Below her within the city she saw not only dusty walls that shut out the light, but lights too which shone from within. She came down from her morning of prayer no longer crying out for freedom. Freedom she had gained through forgetfulness of self. She was filled with a deep abiding sense of joy as she went back through the awakening streets to her own husband and child.

Bo Te had crawled down from his bed and sat in the corner of the room playing with the broken bits of the little ivory idol Chang An had kept hanging about his neck. He reached out eager hands to his mother asking her to fix it again. She held him close, a song of happiness throbbing in her heart.

Fuh Tang still lay in the stupor of drugged sleep, but as she leaned over him she saw in his blue-lined face something of the price that he had paid for her freedom thus far. For the first time she saw the real contrast between him and the handsome gallant man who had loved her enough to break down the walls of custom for her and sacrifice his own career to earn her bread by daily work. She saw him not as a destroyer of her trust, but as the victim of circumstances which had been too great for both of them until now. She saw thus now because she measured their love not by her need of him, but by his need of her. She read, too, in the repeated calls from his household for their return more than just the desire to enforce old traditions. She felt something of the weight of the household burdens upon the tired shoulders of Madame Chia, and the patience and understanding which it required to keep life going on smoothly and happily in a home. And she knew that according to custom it was her duty, as the wife of the eldest son of the family, to relieve Madame Chia and to be ready to take her place when she should be called to the world beyond.

She saw her path of service within her own small world first in ministering to those who

had need of her and then perhaps out through them to others.

With an abiding peace in her heart Kuei Ping unfolded and put back in the familiar pigskin chests the garments she had prepared for her pilgrimage.

*Wherein
there is
patience
and tenderness
and understanding
and a
return to
a little
home village*



A PROCESSION of three sedan chairs made its way along the Big Horse Street of Kuei Ping's home village. It was the time of the Feast of Lanterns. Made in shapes of birds, and fish with great eyes, and cocks, and little houses that spun round and round when they were lit, some large and some small, they decorated the shops and hung in front of entrance ways, or dangled from sedan chairs. Bo Te, riding with his father in the front of the procession, cried out in glee over each new display or shouted in pure ecstasy over the firing of a particularly loud bunch of firecrackers. The street was packed with slow-moving holiday makers and with vendors who cried their wares and made sales in the midst of traffic, so that Fuh Tang spoke to the chair-bearer in the lead asking him to go through the more quiet Street of Precious Pearls and connect with the hutung on the opposite side.

Kuei Ping rode second in the home-bound procession. Chang An, following behind, leaned forward and raised her voice to remind her of the day, which seemed so long ago now, on which they had come here to buy Kuei Ping's dowry pearls. The street, too, had its decking in honor of the holiday, dainty lanterns of dull gold decorated in red hung

before Wong Lui's close-shuttered doorways, and lovely ones shaped like bright colored autumn leaves decorated a shop farther down the street.

The chairs wound out of the Street of Precious Pearls and on through the streets along which Kuei Ping had passed on her wedding day. Then she had gone in darkness, wrapped in heavy veils, toward a life of unfamiliar things. To-day she came through the same streets again to the Chia compound, conscious of joy in her coming, filled with a deep gladness that she had a place there. Her husband seemed to gather new strength as they passed through ways he had known in boyhood.

Chia Sung Lien with his household met them at the gateways to the family dwelling. Shining with happiness, the old man bade them welcome and begged them to accept his apology that the honorable mother could not meet them at the doorway too, but that she bade them come to her pavilion with haste that she might greet them. When the formal greetings were over Chia Sung Lien took his little grandson about, showing him the wonders of the courtyards, bringing out for his delight the little secret boxes of play treasures saved from his own boyhood, figures

carved of ivory and of ebony, coins which he had saved from pocket-money years ago, letting the child hold the pet birds upon their perching sticks, showing him the purple velvet carp and the silver and gold fish in the fish pond, and exhibiting him to all the old servants of the household and to all the relatives who came to call.

Joy and love radiated through the vast dwelling and were reflected in the passive faces of all who made their home there. Kuei Ping came to realize almost as a revelation the gentle respect for each other and the careful consideration of the group as a whole which were absolutely essential to the life of the compound. What she had at first accepted as natural, then struggled against as a barrier to life, she came now to see in a truer light and to value that which was best in it. She saw with new eyes the patience required upon the part of Madame Chia to keep the household running smoothly and happily. The old woman, now no longer able to go about, directed affairs from her great bed, dividing duties and favors among the daughters-in-law of the family who again divided them among the other members of the house.

Going to visit within her own girlhood

dwelling, Kuei Ping, from out of her brief experience, came away again marvelling at the smoothness of her grandmother's plans, and the care with which her mother had been taught to carry on the family rites after Madame Yen should go on to the life beyond.

Both families accepted with quiet respect Kuei Ping's feeling about the God in whose service she now lived. If they felt her mistaken they did not speak of it. The duties of attendance upon the family altar and the dropping of daily rice before the Kitchen God were continued by the widow of the deceased son. Kuei Ping came in turn to see beauty in the regularity with which they served as they believed, and the patience with which they lived.

In the dimly lighted courtyard under the familiar magnolia trees she walked with Fuh Tang. His steps were slower now. On the branches above their heads hung lanterns for the festival, through the latticed windows of the rooms about the court warm home lights glowed, from the kitchen court came the sound of servants chattering as they finished the tasks of the day, then above the other noises rose the shrill voice of their son. They stayed their steps to listen. He was telling the other children of the compound about the

courtyard in which he had lived with Father and Mother and Chang An and an old gate-man all by himself, telling them about the big city that is Peking. And of the wondrous procession which he had once seen there when Father had lifted him upon the wall that he might get a far-away glimpse of the Emperor with lots and lots of banners and men going with him. They heard him say that when he grew up he was going to be an Emperor and ride along a golden road at the head of a big procession. They heard him shout that he would if he wanted to, when the other children mocked his dream with its impossibility. They heard Chang An bear him away to bed.

Fuh Tang's eyes twinkled with humor as he looked down at Kuei Ping. She laughed back. The barrier that had seemed to separate them was down. True, the walls of the compound that had pressed in upon their earlier freedom were about them, but Kuei Ping saw them now only as encircling walls of stone and mortar.



*Wherein
twenty-seven
slow years
are added
one upon
another*

THE years that followed were but the melting together of the pearls of Kuei Ping's life. They held the gems of joy and of sorrow. She took up again the task of learning from Madame Chia the ways of household management, observing as carefully as possible the honorable mother's wishes, coming to love her for her patience and her ability. She went often during the remaining days of Madame Yen's life to the bedside, sometimes reading to her grandmother from the Book of Life she had received from the West, sometimes listening quietly as the old lady told her bits of wisdom she had learned from her own living.

The second of the new years within the compound gave to Kuei Ping a baby girl. Fuh Tang, growing steadily weaker, brightened with the coming of the gentle little child. Kuei Ping watched him as he played with the baby and let a hope grow in her heart that he would be well again. The entire household came to share that hope. A year passed in which each of the days was a glorious promise of more.

Then the end came suddenly in a short spasm of suffering. When it was over Kuei Ping could not feel that Fuh Tang was

finished with life, but that he had passed on where there was no more of earthly suffering.

The long days that followed bore their pain of loneliness. The sleeves of his garments hung so empty and lay so still as she folded them away. Bo Te cried piteously for the return of his father. Stilling his cries and lulling to sleep the little daughter, Kuei Ping felt herself to blame that she had wanted freedom and perhaps had bought it with Fuh Tang's life. Then there came over her a great thankfulness for what he had given her—the right to come and go as she chose through the compound door, two children to guide in their wanderings beyond it, and a love that seemed nearer now than it had since those days when the weariness had first begun to come upon him.

Her days were different from those of the women whose homes joined hers along the hutung only in that she had greater personal freedom and that she sought to live by the pattern of the life of Christ. The duties were the same round of daily household tasks. Time and time again she found it hard to live as near like the Master in kindness and love as the women whom she knew who still worshipped in the old familiar ways. But as her daughter grew older she was tenfold thank-

ful for the little she had learned of Christian faith and of the place it gave to women.

While Kuei Ping's children were small she taught them, gathering about her each morning, as her uncle had done before her, all the children of the compound. She followed in her lesson plans the same teaching of nature from the plants in the garden, the same beginning of five written characters from the old classics each day, but to the worn book of Rites she added the parables from the book of Christ. A dream grew then,—to found a home school in which all the children of the neighborhood who would, might come and learn not the western way of life, but the home way enlightened by the teachings of Jesus.

Almost miraculously she and her little village passed untouched through the Boxer rebellion. Perhaps it was their smallness that saved them from the destroying hand of the fanatically-crazed men who sought to save their country as the center of the universe, complete in itself, and to drive out all other influences. Kuei Ping likes to think of it as a modern miracle.

But the fall of the Manchus and the coming of a Republic so cut down her means that the little school had to be pushed back again

into the realm of dreams after it had grown to a reality with twenty day students. One entire side of the home had been used for the plan. Now only a few rooms of the compound were Kuei Ping's even for dwelling quarters, for other Chia relatives came seeking shelter. Their official incomes shaved to a mere pittance, the fatty places in which they had squeezed more than twice their earnings taken away, the piteous flock did not know what else to do.

It was then that Kuei Ping faced the problem not of dividing what she had with others but of earning for her own children their livelihood and of preparing them to fill the place in life which she had so blithely planned for them. Again her thoughts turned to the West where women knew how to do things with which to earn money. Bo Te, now called by his school name Kwan Wa, begged to give up his education and to seek for work. He had only two more years of study before the completion of his chosen course, and as he had been offered the opportunity of a scholarship she refused to consider the suggestion.

It was then that she began to teach foreigners Chinese. Miss Porter, to whom she went with her problem, sent her the first two pupils. She found two rooms in a section of

a courtyard near enough to the mission school for her daughter to attend classes with other girls of her own age. The expenses of her life were small, her group of private pupils grew larger and as she came to earn even a little more than she needed, this she added to a tiny growing heap of savings. Bit by bit she revived again the hope that when her son had finished his education she would build her school. As a part of this growing plan she held as capital the string of pearls bought so long ago. The jewels, treasured as they had been through each period of vicissitude in her life, had come to have an intrinsic beauty which strengthened her desire to use them where they would luminate the lives of others.

The affairs of government rocked above her head. She was conscious of them but they did not shake her determination to secure the title to a part of the old home where her maternal grandmother had spent her life, to be used for her school.

Then her little daughter fell ill of fever. Long months of nursing made her better but the foreign doctor urged the seashore and Kuei Ping again delayed her school plans, and took from her savings.

Kwan Wa's marriage and an opportunity

to begin the school came in the same year. His work for the year took him to Mukden and his salary was sufficient to make her earnings unnecessary for the family needs.

He, too, shared her plan for the home school and widened that dream to a plan that they should build near it a church for the worship of the Christian God whom they sought to follow.

It was a joyous day when Chia Kuei Ping at last saw the dream again a reality. No new buildings were built. The old compound in which her mother had lived before she was married was large enough for a part to be used as a dwelling and a part for classes. Each overlapped the other so that they were one—a home where education and living are one and the same.

The plan grew more rapidly than she could well manage alone. Then she discovered a man and his wife, childless, followers too of this new religion from the West but members of another of its man-made branches, who wished to help. They came to her to add to her teaching staff, giving their time and their small income to the project.

Again as time passed and the word of the school and its teachings spread, she found

that her doors must be widened and her pocketbook fattened to make possible the needed expenditures. It was then that she returned to the task of teaching foreigners to speak Chinese, riding the twenty long miles to and from her home twice a week to the city of Peking.

A small inheritance came from her father's family and this was laid aside as the beginning of the church she dreamed of building, where in a place set apart those who wished to enter might find a quiet place for communion with God. Into this building she put her dowry pearls, at last.

On her fiftieth birthday the people of her village laid the corner stone of the new church and even those who followed still the ways of worship of their fathers lent their hands to the building.



*Wherein the
narrator
becomes
Kuei Ping's pupil
and is
filled with
wondering questions
and is witness
to a dream
come true
in its
threefold parts .*



THE key to new treasure is often found in places unexpectedly near. It was midforenoon of a day in early spring. I approached the stuffy cubby hole, in which my private teacher waited, with lagging steps, struggling with the temptation to be finished with school for the day. On Hatamen Street a fortune teller squatted, reading fates with his magic paraphernalia; outside of Chen Men an old man in a lantern had promised to teach me to paint on parchment; there was a temple bazaar on at Lung Fa Fsu—a dozen different allurements called. Reluctantly I tapped upon the door several minutes late.

A woman older than my former teacher bade me enter. It is the custom in the school where I study Mandarin, or official Chinese, to change instructors often lest one copy too accurately mannerisms in intonation. Perhaps had it not been spring, or had I not been late we would have conned over lessons for weeks and gone no deeper behind the veil of passive expression on either face, each of us busy with her own thoughts while we droned over Chinese proverbs. As it was I had seen the official looking document laid upon the table and the light in Chia Kuei Ping's eyes that told better than words the story of a long

hoped for dream suddenly come true. Perhaps she felt the need in mine. I count it among the most precious treasures of my life that she did not pass me by with only a drilling on Chinese proverbs.

Proverbs are good, but she gave me much more. The document she translated was the appointment of her son to go to study railway transportation for three years in America, England and the continent of Europe. While she talked, I who could understand only a few of her words, caught something of what that meant to her and to her people. Through her eyes I saw burdens lifted from the necks of millions of overladen men and women who with their bodies now make the largest part of the transportation service of her country. She was not blinded to the long years before her son's dream of an interlacing series of freight trains should take their place; but her dream had been fulfilled in his opportunity.

The days that followed were filled with deep joy for me. In the atmosphere of her own home Kuei Ping let me know her daughter and her four grandchildren. Nestled at the foot of the western hills, where seventeen generations of her mother's family have dwelt, she let me sit at her feet and listen to life as it was lived about her. She did not

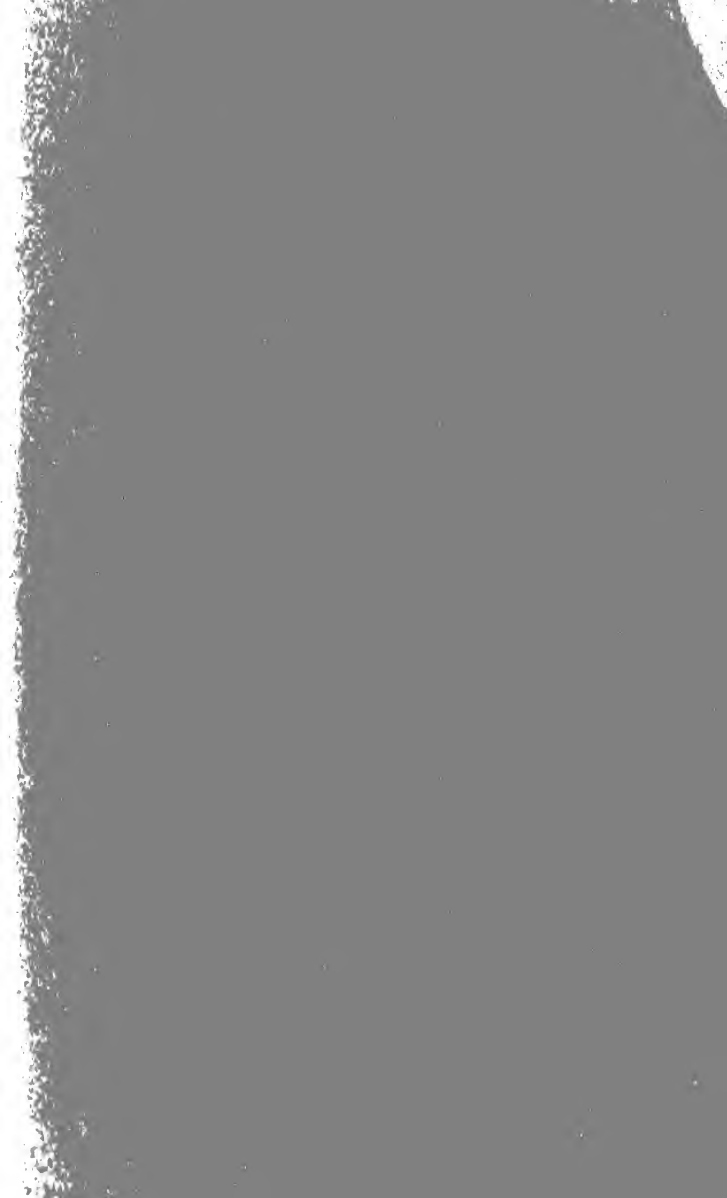
still my eager questions, but she shared with me what she had learned from fifty-five years of life, teaching as simply and as eagerly as she taught the pupils of her own school.

Ancient trees mark cool spots of deep green on the bare cathedral-like glory of western hills that overlook her village. They shelter the ancient temples in which her forefathers and her neighbors have worshipped for many generations. Some are falling into decay, but all have been built with infinite care by the hand of man. In the quiet of early morning I have listened with Chia Kuei Ping to the chant of services in the Llama temple, to make which men carried pure white marble all the way from India that they might have a fitting dwelling place for their gods. I have walked with her beneath the peaceful shade of wide-spreading trees that stretch their branches over the roof of a temple where men and women seek through worship of Buddha to bring blessedness to themselves and their families. She has led me beneath the counting board whose legend reads "As you live so shall the evils be marked against you," through the noisy mart of a Taoist temple where seekers after truth please their gods by avoiding evil.

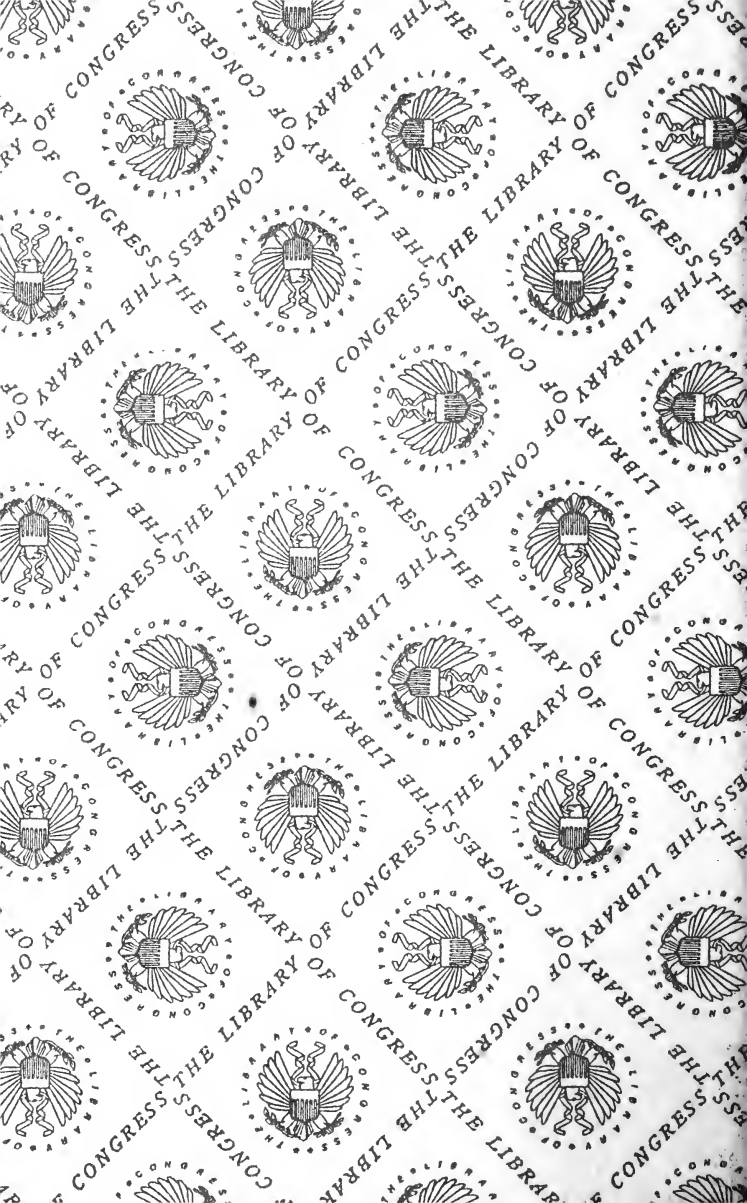
The mountains overlook, and the temples

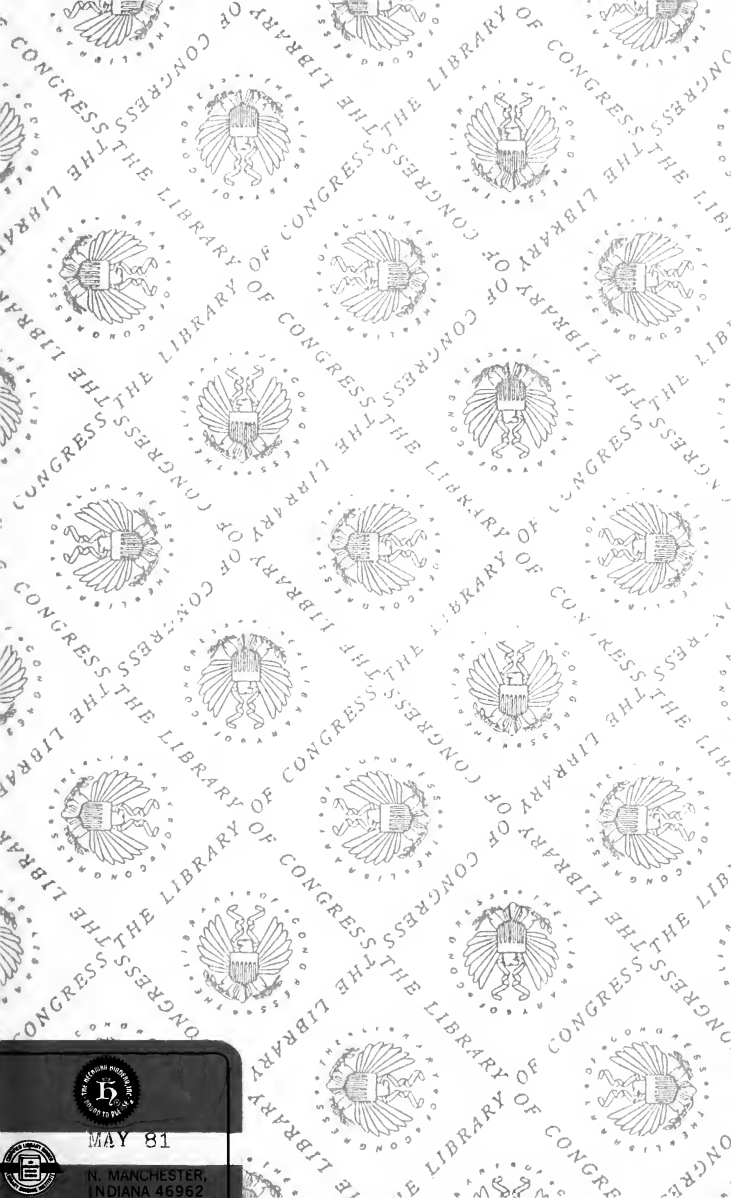
surround, her little school and church, the former but a part of her ancient family dwelling, the latter new like her religion. The trees that surround it are but slender saplings, little more than sprouting roots. The simple structure of the building has no architectural beauty to compare with the ancient temples on the hillside. I wonder just a little at her daring to place it there. Then from within her dwelling comes the sound of childish voices singing—the children who are being taught what she has learned of life while she goes just a little ahead, listening with the eager heart of youth for the voice of the Father who gave his Son that those who seek might learn of Him. Her school is filled to overflowing with the youth of her village.

Parents, too long bound by old tradition to learn to walk in new ways, covet for their children the luminous light that shines in the eyes of Chia Kuei Ping.









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